

Social Media Crisis Communications Tips

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In today's connected world, failure to take action during a crisis can swiftly tarnish the reputation and goodwill of your company. Social media channels accelerate the pace with which news is shared, making the window for managing crises smaller. Social media, however, also allows companies to build a community of fans and evangelists that can be the best defense in a crisis situation.

Three takeaways for your clients on social media crisis communications:

- **Preparation makes all the difference.** A company cannot be ready to act quickly and effectively in response to crises unless it has planned to do so. It's an obvious concept that all would agree to, and yet the ones that adequately plan for crises are surprisingly rare.
- **Clients and customers are your best defense.** One of the best things that companies can do to prepare for a social media crisis is to build solid relationships with their clients and customers, as well as significant media outlets and influencers in their field. If successful, your fan base will come to your defense when something goes wrong. On the other hand, if the first time you come to reporters is in the midst of a crisis situation, it will be hard to establish the trust necessary to turn a story your way.
- **Is it really a crisis?** When faced with a potential crisis situation, take a step back and identify whether a crisis truly exists. Negative exposure in the social media space does not always warrant a full response. Understanding the big picture will keep you from making the problem worse than it actually is.

Best practices to consider when using social media for a crisis situation:

- **Assess the impact on your client/customer base:** Ask yourself whether a large enough percentage of your customer base been affected to require a public message?
- **Try to anticipate reactions:** Keep in mind what the anticipated reaction may be in order to craft the right social media strategy – whether this means issuing a corporate apology and/or responding directly to comments.
- **Don't overwhelm your followers:** While you should always strive to be transparent, it's wise to temper your messages so that they appropriately respond to the situation, without further fanning the flames. If you've succeeded in building solid customer relationships, they will provide your best defense – their loyalty.
- **Identify a spokesperson:** Consider who the appropriate corporate source should be (the bigger the issue, the more likely the message needs to come from the CEO).

Background reading from Hellerman Baretz Communications:

- [A Social Media Policy Checklist](#)
- [When to Engage \(or not\) in the Social Media Conversation](#)
- [Apple's Social Media Policy Leaked](#)
- [Apologies and Social Media](#)

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